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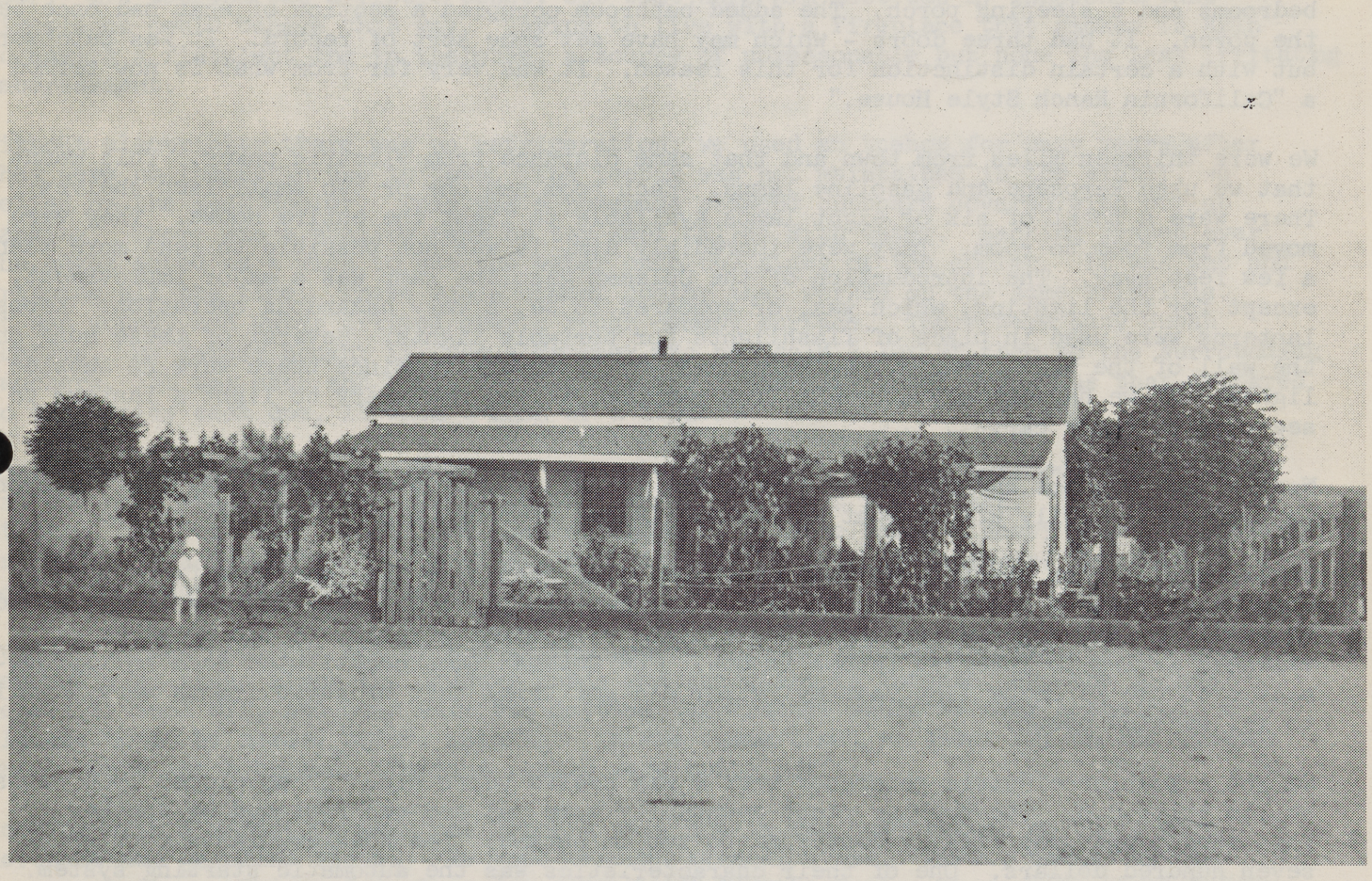
THE MADERA COUNTY HISTORIAN

MADERA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY QUARTERLY

Volume XI - Number 4 October 1971



THE RANCH HOUSE
By
Paul Benjamin Archibald

Soon after my parents married in 1914, they moved to what was to be called the Henry Archibald Ranch. There was a house and ranch buildings that even then were old. Father said that the house, one of the oldest in the area, had been built about 1890. Some of the original ranch buildings had been built with square nails. The house originally had been quite small, with two bedrooms, a living room, a dining room, kitchen and a pantry. There was a bathtub in the pantry which father installed - the rest of the plumbing was out in back. The toilet had a water closet.

One of the characteristics of these early ranch houses was the use of porches. Our's had a porch that nearly incircled the house. As more rooms were added, they might be placed outside the porch. This had happened to this house, creating what might now be called a breezeway. Porches have been "out" for years, as they serve no vital purpose, or so it is said. In these early houses, they served as protection from the sun for the house proper during the long hot summer. The house was finally enlarged to include three bedrooms and a sleeping porch. The added bathroom occupied a section of what had once been the porch. It had three doors - which may have set some sort of record. It was patchwork, but with a certain distinction for this reason. It was very far from what is now termed a "California Ranch Style House."

We were thirteen miles from town and that same distance from electric power. This meant that we used kerosene and gasoline lamps. Each room had one or two small lamp shelves. There were a total of six or eight lamps available to light the entire house. They were moved from room to room. They were incredibly dim, it was not possible to read more than a few feet away. The introduction of the Coleman gasoline lamp was a major improvement, except for the lighting, which was, or appeared to be, a very hazardous operation. Kerosene lanterns were used in place of flashlights for portable lights. Several of these hung on the wall of the back porch. They were used very frequently, since there were no outside lights. If we had company at night, for example, it was necessary to light a lantern to see them to their car.

None of the ranches had electric lights, and it was very frustrating to know that everyone in town could easily afford what was seemingly out of reach for the country people.

One substitute for electricity was acetylene. The acetylene was generated from calcium carbide and water, as in a miner's lamp. The gas was piped into the house where it could be used for lighting and cooking. These units were never popular. I can remember a salesman trying to interest father in one. The Coleman lamp constituted such an improvement over the kerosene lamp that my father did not think that electric lights were anything to get excited about.

We got a Koehler electric generator when I was twelve years old. It developed 1500 watts at 110 volts D.C. The Koehler plant eventually wore out and was replaced by another. This second unit was finally converted to run on butane. The Koehler plants cost about seven hundred dollars. One of their characteristics was the automatic starting system. When a light switch was turned on, the starter, operating from a large storage battery, would automatically start the gasoline engine. The engine had an automatic choke, something that had not yet appeared on automobiles. When the engine got up to speed, the starter would cut and the light would come on. This meant a wait of a minute or more in cold weather. We did not throw out the kerosene lamps.

The Daultons were the first to get a Koehler plant. There were three Daulton houses close enough to share the same unit. One of the problems with these plants was that the engine kept everyone awake. Consequently, all went to bed at the same time. The Daultons had

the same problem, only there were three families to coordinate. Their power plant was at the grandfather's house and naturally he wanted to go to bed earlier than anyone else. He was firm on this point, and after ten o'clock they used kerosene lamps if they wanted to stay up longer.

Cooking was done on a wood stove, and for many years our house was heated by a fireplace. This was not a big fireplace either - nowadays it would be considered unfashionably small. At that time, the building of fireplaces was a very inexact science. So much so that many people felt that fireplaces could not be built with any assurance that they would not smoke, and preferred to use woodburning stoves instead.

Our fireplace did not smoke, but I can remember that the large and handsome fireplace up at the Clay Daultons did, unless the door onto the back porch was kept slightly ajar. Mr. Daulton was proud of his fireplace made from rocks from the ranch and did not like to think about this weakness. I discovered it when I was ten years old and closed the door. Mr. Daulton was a little upset, but what hurt him most was my innocence that fireplaces could behave this way. Having to live with a fireplace that smokes is akin to having a flatulent dog in the house, a source of unreasonable but none the less irritating embarassment.

Without electricity there was no refrigeration; we used an icebox for many years after they were no longer in use in town. The icebox was not maintained in the winter, we relied on the sack cooler. This was a homemade redwood cupboard covered with burlap sacking. There was a shallow tank on top kept filled with water. Sacking draped over the edges acted as a wick to get the water onto the sides of the cooler. It was wet and dripping all the time. There was a cement cooler that worked on the same principle. It was round, and water dripped over a rough cement surface. There were Lazy Susan shelves. My father bought it from a drummer who had sold a lot of them to the surrounding ranchers. It was neat and built to last forever. The only thing wrong was that compared to the untidy sack one, it wasn't much of a cooler.

There was a general feeling among the adults that the hot summers were over-exaggerated and the cold winters unappreciated by the people who built the houses. The houses, all of them, not just ours, must have been designed by someone who had never spent the winter in the San Joaquin Valley. The elders said it was the wind and dampness - enough to make even a Nova Scotian shiver.

Summertime was hot, but not as hot as the people driving through thought. There are generally no trees along the country roads and the glare is intense, but the nights generally cool off, and even when the daytime temperature would be over a hundred, a blanket would be needed before morning. In the summertime, we slept out on the porches where there was a breeze. Porches really were quite useful.

Cooking with a woodstove made the kitchen very hot in the summertime, so there were kerosene and gasoline stoves. We went through several types. First, there was the kerosene stove. This had a glass jar on one end for the fuel. There were three burners and an oven. These burners had wicks like a lamp. The next was a gasoline burner in the wood range. The fuel was stored outside in a pressure tank that had to be pumped up like a blow torch. We had this for awhile, not so much as a convenience, but to keep the heat out of the kitchen. Uncle Will and Uncle Charlie were trying out the same sorts of stoves at the same time. The last gasoline stove was a three burner with a tank attached. It was similar to a camp stove. It must have made somebody nervous, since it was set up out on the back porch just in case it leaked fumes. The gasoline stove was preferred over kerosene because it did not blacken the pots. Along in the thirties, propane became available and then a few years later, butane.

With a wood stove the hot water is heated by a coil in the firebox connected into a storage tank in back of the stove. Taking a bath was not a question of personal convenience, but had to be planned in advance. We did not take baths more than twice a week. We boys thought that adequate. Sometimes mother would give us an extra bath just to use up the hot water. The logic of this escaped us small boys. At other times there was not enough hot water to go around and we would have to use the same water. Bob went first, then Roy and I at the same time. Since the bathtub was in the pantry, mother could keep an eye on us and keep down the slopping. If the water got cold after Bob had taken his bath, she would add a teakettle of boiling water. The proper time for these baths was just before dinner, since this would allow the hot water tank to recover before it was time to do the dishes. There was no thermostat on the hot water tank and sometimes it would start boiling; then mother would hurriedly draw off some of the hot water before it burst.

Mother could cook very well in the wood stove, even though the oven temperature indicator had not worked for years - if it ever did. She judged the oven temperature by holding her hand in the oven. There was a lot of cooking to be done and it required more skill than is required at the present time. Even such items as pancakes were made from scratch.

Mother retained many of her Nova Scotian tastes in cooking - we would have salt codfish or finan haddie from time to time. She also had to keep the hired men happy. Mr. King was from Kentucky and needed milk gravy on his biscuits to keep him from getting grouchy. This was every morning.

Father was a fairly competent cook, or at least when it came to getting breakfast he was certainly confident. He always fried the eggs hard. This was general amongst the Archibalds of that generation -, even Aunt Essie was of that persuasion at one time. She once said that they had been brought up to think that an egg that would run when a fork was stuck into it was unfit to eat, or, as she said, "a sin."

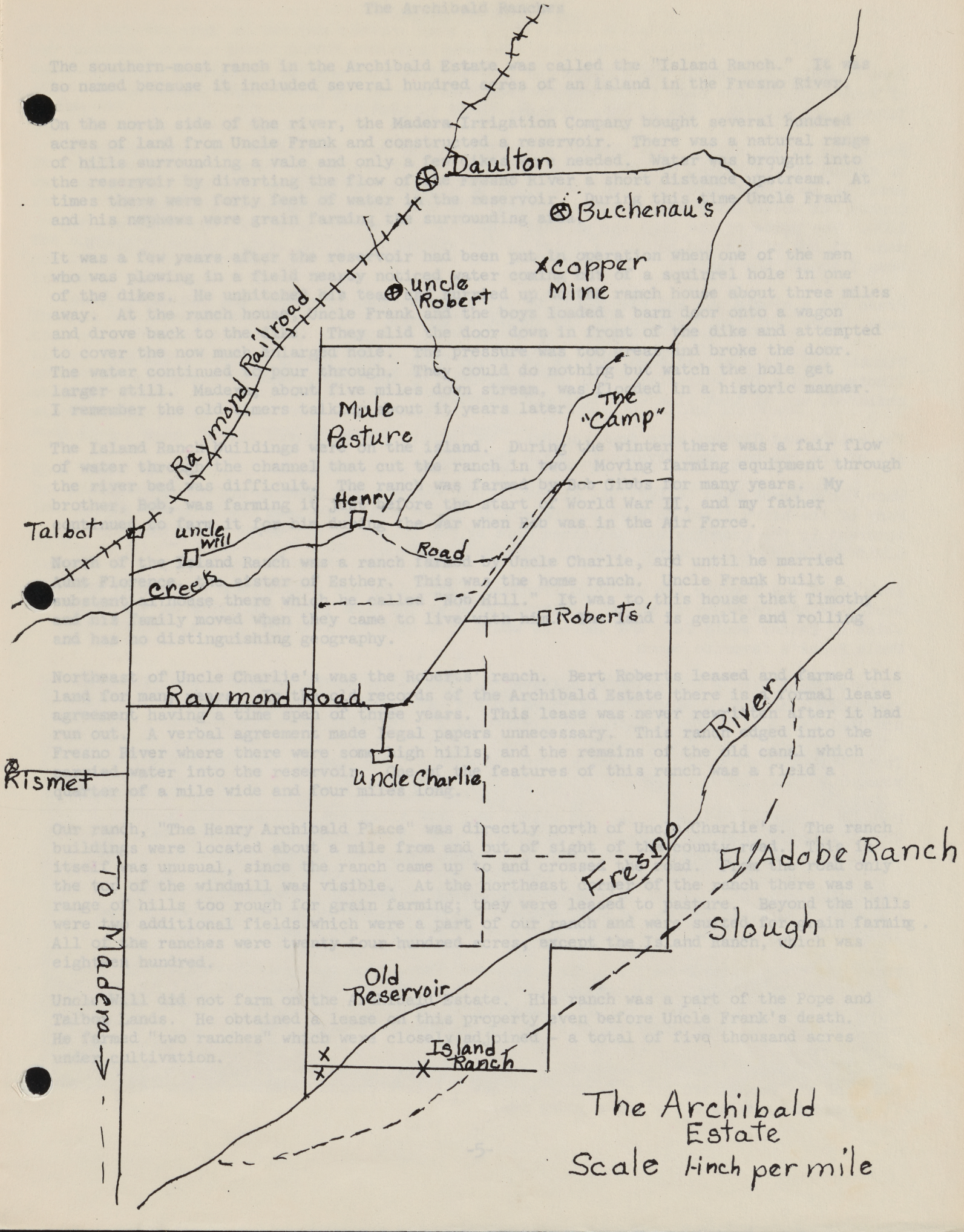
Father told how one time he was cooking up at the camp and one of the men wanted his eggs over. Turning eggs in the pan seemed risky to him, but he obliged by turning over the requested number when he served them on the platter.

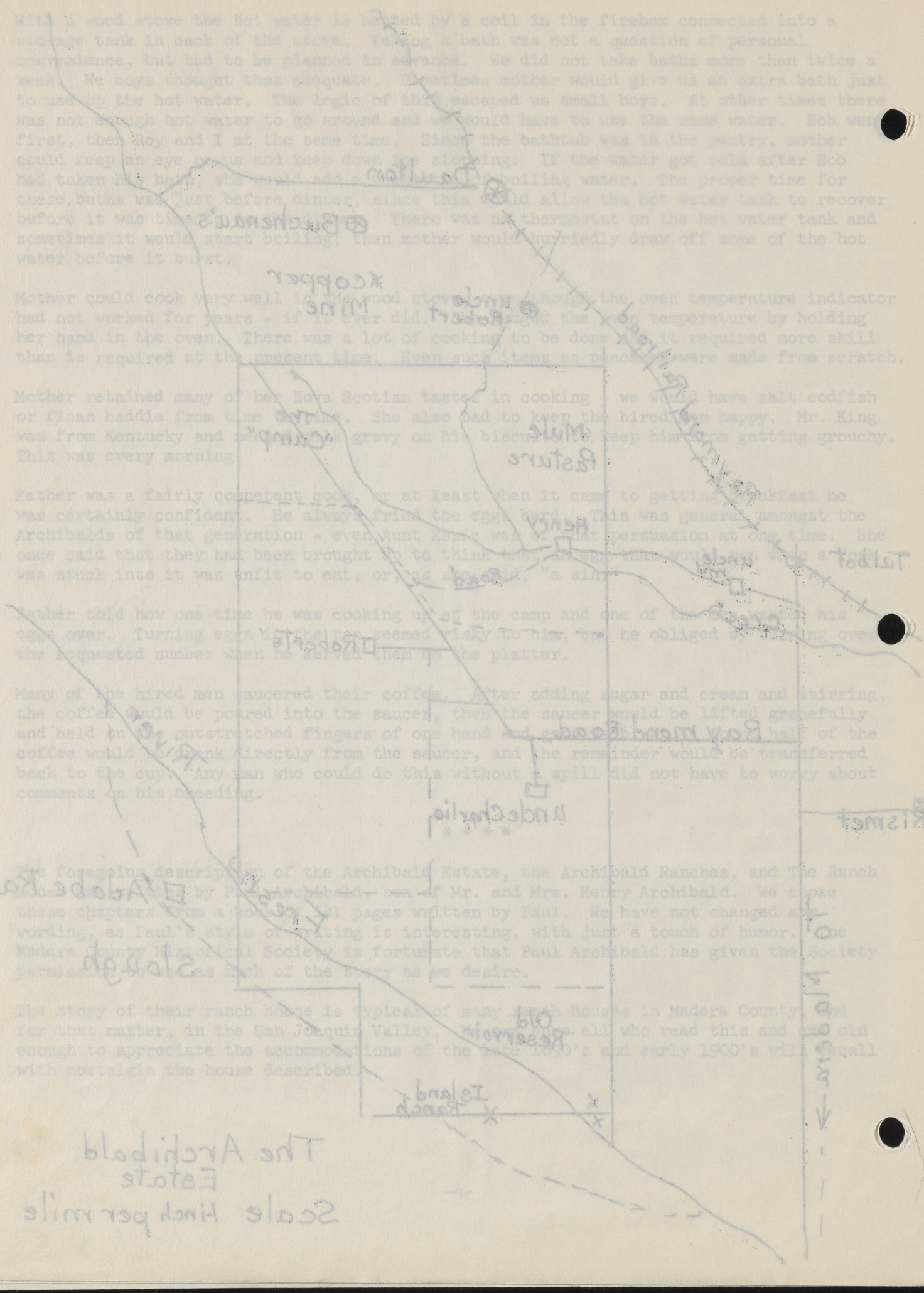
Many of the hired men saucered their coffee. After adding sugar and cream and stirring, the coffee would be poured into the saucer, then the saucer would be lifted gracefully and held on the outstretched fingers of one hand and gently "blown." About half of the coffee would be drank directly from the saucer, and the remainder would be transferred back to the cup. Any man who could do this without a spill did not have to worry about comments on his breeding.

* * * *

The foregoing description of the Archibald Estate, the Archibald Ranches, and The Ranch House was written by Paul Archibald, son of Mr. and Mrs. Henry Archibald. We chose these chapters from a book of 141 pages written by Paul. We have not changed any wording, as Paul's style of writing is interesting, with just a touch of humor. The Madera County Historical Society is fortunate that Paul Archibald has given the Society permission to use as much of the story as we desire.

The story of their ranch house is typical of many ranch houses in Madera County, and for that matter, in the San Joaquin Valley. We are sure all who read this and are old enough to appreciate the accommodations of the late 1890's and early 1900's will recall with nostalgia the house described.


Daulton
Buchenau's
copper Mine
uncle Robert
Raymond Railroad
Mule Pasture
The "Camp"
Henry
Talbot
uncle Will
Creek
Road
Roberts'
Raymond Road
Rismet
uncle Charlie
River
Fresno
Adobe Ranch
Slough
To Madera
Old Reservoir
Island Ranch
The Archibald Estate
Scale 1 inch per mile


Uncle Charlie
Old Reservoir
Island Ranch
Adobe Ranch
Stable
Uncle Henry
Road
Road
Road

The southern-most ranch in the Archibald Estate was called the "Island Ranch." It was so named because it included several hundred acres of an island in the Fresno River.

On the north side of the river, the Madera Irrigation Company bought several hundred acres of land from Uncle Frank and constructed a reservoir. There was a natural range of hills surrounding a vale and only a few dikes were needed. Water was brought into the reservoir by diverting the flow of the Fresno River a short distance upstream. At times there were forty feet of water in the reservoir. During this time Uncle Frank and his nephews were grain farming the surrounding area.

It was a few years after the reservoir had been put in operation when one of the men who was plowing in a field nearby noticed water coming out of a squirrel hole in one of the dikes. He unhitched his team and hurried up to the ranch house about three miles away. At the ranch house, Uncle Frank and the boys loaded a barn door onto a wagon and drove back to the dike. They slid the door down in front of the dike and attempted to cover the now much enlarged hole. The pressure was too great and broke the door. The water continued to pour through. They could do nothing but watch the hole get larger still. Madera, about five miles down stream, was flooded in a historic manner. I remember the old timers talking about it years later.

The Island Ranch buildings were on the island. During the winter there was a fair flow of water through the channel that cut the ranch in two. Moving farming equipment through the river bed was difficult. The ranch was farmed by Bob Gibbs for many years. My brother, Bob, was farming it just before the start of World War II, and my father continued to farm it for him during the war when Bob was in the Air Force.

North of the Island Ranch was a ranch farmed by Uncle Charlie, and until he married Aunt Florence, the sister of Esther. This was the home ranch. Uncle Frank built a substantial house there which he called "Nob Hill." It was to this house that Timothy and his family moved when they came to live with him. The land is gentle and rolling and has no distinguishing geography.

Northeast of Uncle Charlie's was the Roberts' ranch. Bert Roberts leased and farmed this land for many years. In the old records of the Archibald Estate there is a formal lease agreement having a time span of three years. This lease was never rewritten after it had run out. A verbal agreement made legal papers unnecessary. This ranch edged into the Fresno River where there were some high hills, and the remains of the old canal which carried water into the reservoir. One of the features of this ranch was a field a quarter of a mile wide and four miles long.

Our ranch, "The Henry Archibald Place" was directly north of Uncle Charlie's. The ranch buildings were located about a mile from and out of sight of the county road. This in itself was unusual, since the ranch came up to and crossed the road. From the road only the top of the windmill was visible. At the northeast corner of the ranch there was a range of hills too rough for grain farming; they were leased to pasture. Beyond the hills were two additional fields which were a part of our ranch and were suited for grain farming. All of the ranches were twenty four hundred acres, except the Island Ranch, which was eighteen hundred.

Uncle Will did not farm on the Archibald Estate. His ranch was a part of the Pope and Talbot Lands. He obtained a lease on this property even before Uncle Frank's death. He farmed "two ranches" which were closely adjoined - a total of five thousand acres under cultivation.

John Franklin Archibald, who founded the Archibald Estate, was the third in a family of four brothers who came to California from Nova Scotia. His two older brothers, Timothy and William, came as boys in their teens in 1858.

Frank, as he was called, was already a skilled farmer when he settled near the community of Mormon Bar in Merced County in the 1880's. After a few years, seeking a less crowded area, he located a block of land consisting of eighteen sections in what was then Fresno County but would later become Madera County. He obtained possession of the land in 1904. The price of the land was at that time four dollars an acre. He was not a wealthy man. In one of his old notebooks there is the statement, "I had seven hundred dollars when I bought the ranch."

Frank was a single man and was joined by his older brother, Timothy, and Timothy's four sons, Henry, William, Charles and the daughter, Esther.

Timothy and his sons had been farming in Fresno County near Reedley. Both Frank and Timothy died a few years later and the management of the estate went to Timothy's children, who at that time were in their twenties.

The estate was divided into four ranches. My father, Henry, farmed one of these ranches. All of the ranches were devoted to grain farming.

When Uncle Frank died he left his estate to his brothers and sisters and to their heirs. Many of the heirs lived in Nova Scotia and of course had never seen the estate. Their interest in the property was sustained more by the chance of oil being found than any dividends which might accrue from the farming operation.

Both Frank and Timothy (he was more frequently called by his middle name of Putman) are buried in the cemetery at Madera. Timothy died at the home place and Frank at the ranch which my father would farm and where he would live with his family. It was, father said, Uncle Frank's favorite ranch.

In retrospect, it is difficult to believe that the ranch really existed. When I was a small boy I assumed that every boy lived on the same kind of a ranch, with a hired man and the same sort of house with a tall windmill out in front and no neighbors.

There were three boys in the family; Bob was a year older than I, and Roy was three years younger. I was born in 1916.

Uncle Will had two girls, Ellen and Alice, who were about the same age as Bob and I. When they were about eight and ten they moved with their mother to Oakland. Uncle Charlie had one son, Charles, Jr. He was about ten years younger than me.

Another cousin, Alice, came to live with us when she was seven years old. Her mother had died soon after she was born in western Canada and she had lived with her grandmother in Nova Scotia up until that time. Alice was a year younger than I.

There was some visiting back and forth between ranches when we were small children, but before I started to school I had scarcely played with other boys my own age. The same could be said for Bob and Roy. Our house was particularly isolated. We could see no neighbors and we were out of view of the county road. It was a complete world in itself.

The account which follows is of this ranch where my brothers and I were born. It was a new land and mechanized grain farming was new. I have chosen to describe the ranch as it appeared to me as a boy and a young man.

On the northern edge of our ranch Uncle Robert Wills leased and grain farmed about two thousand acres. Uncle Robert was my grandmother's youngest brother and had been farming up around Michigan Bluff in Placer County when he came down for a visit. He liked the looks of the land and leased this property. In later years, it was known as the Harris Ranch. He raised grain for a number of years when I was a small boy - until the land changed hands.

These large pieces of land were originally cattle and sheep ranches. When grain farming was introduced they continued to be called ranches. This nomenclature was prevalent in California as applied to dry land grain farming.

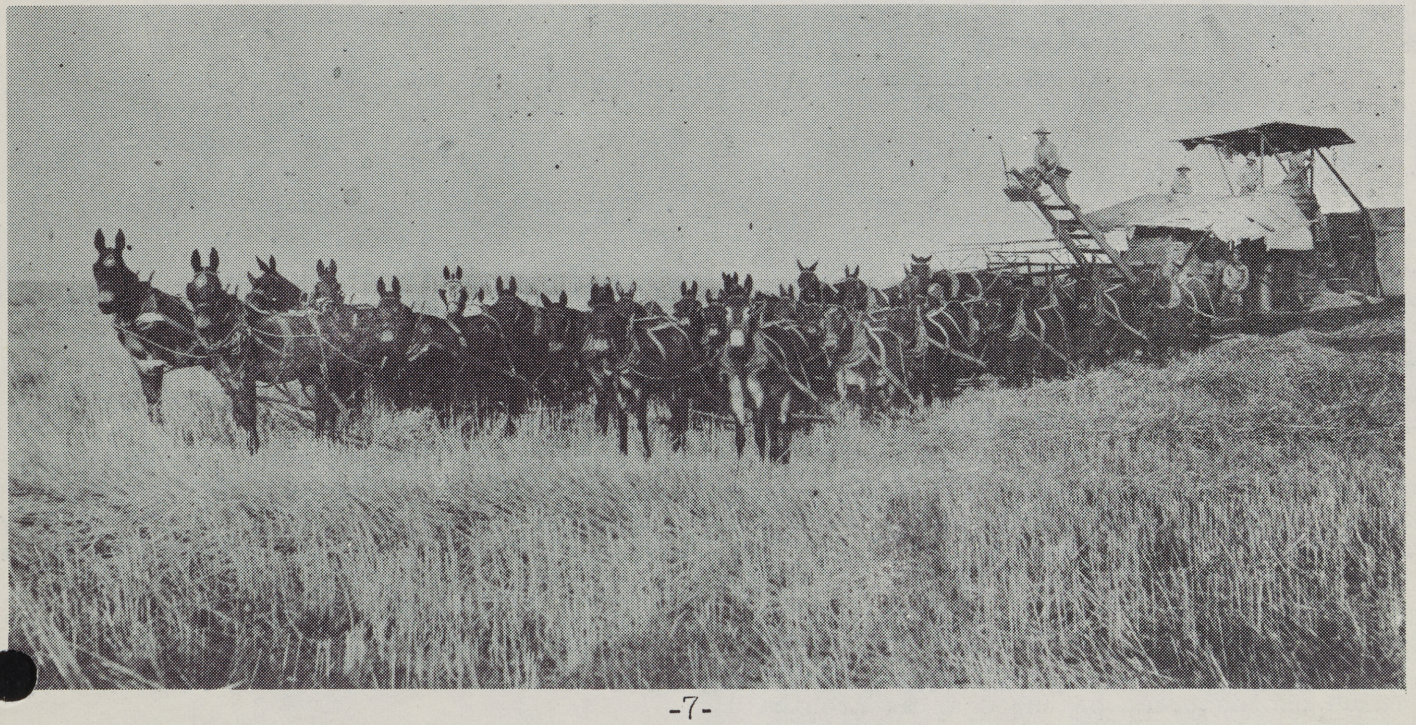
The normal rainfall in this area was between eight and fifteen inches a year. Father considered this adequate; if it came at the right time he could be happy with ten inches of rain.

Indians had once roamed the area, as evidenced by the numerous acorn grinding mortars that were found in the fields during the plowing season. My brother Roy found an elegant example of one in the bottom of a ravine after a heavy rain. It was a round cobblestone about eight inches in diameter; the hollowed-out portion would have held about two cups. In the hills on the northeast corner of the ranch, where there were stone out-croppings, there were Indian mortar holes. I found an Indian arrowhead made from flint, in a furrow in back of the bunkhouse.

When Uncle Frank bought the land he had grain farming in mind, and since his older brother, Timothy, and his sons were experienced in this sort of farming, their association was of mutual benefit.

It was an enormous spread of land, and when Uncle Will's and Uncle Robert's were added in, it was from the top of the windmill, Dad once said "Archibald as far as the eye can see."

* * * *



The Board of Directors of the Madera County Historical Society apologize for the late printing of the last issue of the Historian for 1971. If you were a member for 1971 you will receive it, late as it is.

Remember, when compiling the Historian the writer must have a story, pictures and time. We will do our best to get the issues out on time (as nearly possible as we can) for 1972.

DUES

Even though this is the last 1971 issue, and because it is reaching you in 1972, we wish to remind you that Dues for 1972 are DUE. In order to maintain the Society, it is necessary for our members to pay their dues.

Single Membership	$ 3.00
Married Couple	5.00
Student	1.00
Sustaining	10.00
Life Membership	100.00

Our year is based on the regular calendar year - January 1 to December 31. Dues are delinquent on July 1. Please make dues payable to the Madera County Historical Society, P. O. Box 478, Madera, Calif. 93637

NEW BOOK

One of our members, Vera Canby Davis, has written a book "Fool's Gold." It describes life in Grub Gulch, Madera County.

Exposition Press, Inc. $3.50
50 Jericho Turnpike
Jericho, New York 11753

TREASURER'S REPORT

Our Treasurer, Rintha Robbins, prepared the Annual Treasurer's Report for 1971. A copy is included with this issue.

GIFTS TO THE SOCIETY

It is impossible to list all gifts to the Society that arrive each Quarter, but we mention the following:

1. A letter written to David Barcroft from Ida Savage Bolles, cousin of Major Savage.

2. Three photos taken of the Charles Archibald Ranch - 1910 & 1911.

3. Photo of Yosemite Ave. in Madera before streets were paved.

4. Photo of Southern Hotel in the very early 1900's.

   These were donated by Mrs. Genevieve Conn.

5. A bullet mold found on Fresno River above the Savage Store and Monument. Donated by Sheriff Ed Bates.

6. 1903 book-old Ledger. Many names of early residents around Hensley Bridge and Savage Store areas. Many news items are pasted over some of the pages. Valuable as research material. Donated by Andrew Hensley.

NEW OFFICERS FOR 1972

President	Mr. Rader Roberts
Vice President	Mr. William Welton
Secretary	Mrs. William McKinney
Treasurer	Miss Rintha Robbins
Directors:	Mrs. Hilloray Brown
	Mrs. Jean Kiggins
	Mrs. Lois Traber
	Mrs. Elvira Ahles
	Mrs. Uarda Pezalla
	Mr. Forest Shafer
	Mr. Lawrence Sunia
	Mr. Ray Page

THE MADERA COUNTY HISTORIAN

Contributor for this issue - Paul Benjamin Archibald, Pleasanton, California.

Managing Editors - Board of Directors of the Madera County Historical Society.

Compiled by Maud Lindemann, Curator.

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